

Flying squadron provides capable lift to HOA

Story and photo by Cpl. G. Lane Miley

CAMP LEMONIER, Djibouti – Sailors assigned to the fleet logistics support squadron here realize the importance of their mission, whether delivering supplies, transporting troops to training areas or carrying the Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa commander to appointments in the region.

The sailors of VR-52, a C9-B squadron based at Naval Air Station Willow Grove, Pa., recently took Brig. Gen. Mastin M. Robeson, CJTF-HOA commander, to Ethiopia, and though the flight time was less than an hour, the crew put more than six hours into the plane before the day was done.

"They are a great team, and they have done a great job especially with these extreme circumstances," said Lt. Cmdr. Ken R. Johansen, a pilot for the aircraft.

Due to the high temperatures in Djibouti, the crew had to change one of the plane's wheels prior to takeoff.

During the flight to Ethiopia, the bird was nearly empty aside from the crew and the few passengers. However, it is capable of carrying up to 90 passengers or three large pallets of gear.

"If it can be loaded on a pallet or loaded on the plane, we'll carry it," explained Johansen, a

Doylestown, Pa., native.

While here supporting CJTF-HOA, the unit has served the commander with long distance flights throughout the Horn of Africa. Many have required the sailors to pilot over bodies of water, something the plane could not do without certain modifications.

According to a unit web page, the C9-B is similar to the civilian DC9-30. However, it is fitted with a side loading cargo door, larger fuel tanks and updated navigational equipment.

"We have the most up-to-date information for [course-plotting]," said Johansen.

He explained that the plane works on airways, much like exits on an interstate. While the crew flies numerous missions around the world, the pilots rarely have trouble communicating with the control towers.

"English is the language of aviation. Plus everyone says things in a certain order, so you can expect what they are going to say," said Johansen.

Johansen said last year he carried war materials for Operation Iraqi Freedom, took the deployed troops nearly 25,000 pounds of Christmas presents and brought many of the service members home from the war.

He said each member of the crew has an important role keeping the plane in the air.



Petty Officer 2nd Class Stephen E. Turner, an aircraft structural mechanic with VR-52, remounts a tire on the unit's C9-B.

Prior to takeoff the maintenance crew ensures the plane is fit for flight, the crew chief comes through to double check and the loadmaster ensures the cargo is loaded properly.

Petty Officer 1st Class Joseph E. Thatcher, the loadmaster and an aircraft electrician by trade, said if the weight is not distributed properly the plane would not make it off the ground. He said he enjoys his job, one he has done for the past 21 years, because it is always a real mission.

"You know your job is serious and worthwhile," Thatcher said. "It feels good. I come home at the end of the day with a really good feeling."

Philly relatives meet under African sun

Story and photo by Cpl. G. Lane Miley

CAMP LEMONIER, Djibouti – For many service members, a deployment means time away from loved ones and a desire to be with those family members.

However, deploying to Djibouti to support the Combined Joint Task Force – Horn of Africa has brought the families of two Philadelphia natives together.

Navy Chief Petty Officer Michael S. Holloman met his second cousin Spc. Terrance D. Holloman not 24 hours after his plane landed here Feb. 1.



Spc. Terrance D. Holloman stands next to his cousin Chief Petty Officer Michael S. Holloman. The two met not 24 hours after Michael's plane landed here Feb. 1. Since their meeting they have spent time together and strengthened the family bonds at their hometown of Philadelphia.

"I was coming out of the exchange and he stopped me," said the senior enlisted sailor of their meeting.

The soldier said reading his own name on the blouse of a sailor compelled him to stop his possible kin.

"I saw the name and I just had to ask," said the younger soldier. "If we had not been wearing uniforms we wouldn't have known."

The two immediately began sharing stories from their youth growing up in the City of Brotherly Love, where they lived only a few blocks apart.

Though the two lived in such close proximity, it wasn't until coming here that they met.

"It was the strangest thing because we didn't know either one existed," said the sea-legged Holloman. "It was really strange with our bloodlines this close. It's not a big family, but bigger than we thought."

The two thought they were the last of the family's bloodline, but realized there were more Hollomans than they knew.

"I thought my brother and I were the last two," said the 23-year-old Holloman, who has served in the Army for the past six years.

The relatives said it is nice knowing someone on the camp, but even nicer when it is family.

"He showed me around to some of the interesting sites [of Djibouti]," said the 41-year-old sailor, who has served in the Navy for the past 22 years. "It's a good time any way you slice it."

Their meeting not only fostered relationships in Africa, but also rekindled those in Pennsylvania.

"We e-mailed the family and they were excited," the Navy chief said. "It sparked a reuniting of family and recharged bonds."

The two said a family gathering is planned upon their return to Philadelphia. Their meeting not only sparked a reunion of the Holloman family, but it also

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